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# Pride of Kings

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English translation of Reun ar C'halan, *Lorc'h ar Rouaned* Lesneven: Hor Yezh, 1989. Pp. 104

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**René Galand**

## **THE PRIDE OF KINGS**

### **Foreword**

The three poems of this collection, *The Exile of Uishnigh's Sons*, *The Death of Fer Diad*, and *The Madness of Suibhne*, have been inspired by ancient Irish epics. In these adaptations, I have strived to remain faithful to the spirit of these works, to their violence and to their sensuality which are the opposite of the bland meekness which such historians as Renan or Matthew Arnold, who had undoubtedly been influenced by the bowdlerized translations or adaptations of Macpherson, La Villemarqué and Lady Charlotte Guest considered as the predominant characteristic of Celtic poetry. For centuries, the characters who appear in these texts have haunted the imagination of poets. Today they still return to take their place on the scene of literature. Derdriu, the most beautiful girl in Ireland: she loved only Noisiu, and because of their passion the lovers were relentlessly pursued by her husband, Conchobor, the king of Ulster. The king paid a high price for his perfidy: Fergus mac Roigh, who had stood surety for the life of Noisiu, burnt down the king's palace and laid waste his kingdom. Queen Medv (Maeve) had refused to accept that her husband, king Ailill, could own more riches than herself. Her pride led to the war which is the subject of the epic *Táin Bó Cuailgne*. Like Conchobor, the queen was eventually punished: she was defeated by Cú Chulainn, the champion of Ulster. Cú Chulainn and his foster brother Fer Diad were also the victim of their hubris: Cú Chulainn killed Fer Diad, just as pride also would cause him later to kill his own son Conle and wound the woman he loved, Fand, who came from the magic land of the Sídh. Pride also caused the downfall of Suibhne mac Colmán, king of Dál nAraide. Suibhne (anglicized into Sweeney) had refused to welcome Saint Rónán in his kingdom and killed one of the saint's attendants: the saint's curse led to his madness, and eventually to his death. After many years of wandering in the wilderness, Suibhne recovered some of his reason, and Saint Mo Ling gave him shelter near his oratory. Saint

Rónán's curse was not lifted, and Suibhne's chest was pierced like the chest of the saint's disciple, but Saint Mo Ling was able to lead the mortally wounded king into his church, where, hopefully, Suibhne died at peace with the Lord.

As for the pronunciation of ancient Irish names, one may refer to the translation of the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* by Thomas Kinsella (*The Táin*. Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1969), and to the foreword of *Lorc'h ar Rouaned*, by Reun ar C'halan (Lesneven: Hor Yezh, 1989, pp. 5-10). The reader may thus have an idea of what these names sound like, and also to have a better idea of their effect on the rhythm. One might believe, for instance, that words like *bolga*, *Alba*, *Delga*, *Boirche*, *Colmáin* or *Fingin* have only two syllables: they have three, since an auxiliary vowel sound is introduced between the consonants l, n, r and the consonants b, g, m, and ch (pronounced like German ch in the word "Nacht"). The auxiliary vowel is *□* (the French "e caduc"). For similar reasons, such names as Redg and Garbh are dissyllabic, with the auxiliary *ə* inserted between d and g and r and bh.

## The Exile of the Sons of Uisnigh

*Cid caín lib ind laéchradaí lainn  
cengtae i nEmain iar tochain,  
ardu do-cingtis díá tig  
tri maic adláechdai Uisnig:*

*Noísiu co mmid chollán chain  
(folcud lim-sa dó 'con tain,  
Ardán co ndaun nó muic maiss,  
asclang Ainnli dar ardais.*

*Cid milis lib a mmid mass  
ibes mac Nessa núthmass,  
baúthrium 'riam, réin for brú,  
biad menic ba millsiu:*

*O ro sernad Noísiu nár  
fulocht for foda fíanchlár,  
Millsiu cach biud fo míl  
Ara-rálad mac Uisnig.*

*Cit binni lib I cach mí  
cuislennaig nó chornairi  
isí mo chobair in-díu  
ro cúala céol bad biiniu.  
(Longes mac nUisnig)*

### Cathbad's Prophecy

Derdriu, the Great Bard's daughter,  
Cried in her mother's womb

Even before she was born  
 Derdriu, Fedlimid's daughter  
 The one they would call  
 Derdriu of the Sorrows since  
 Mourning and suffering would be her lot  
 Such was Cathbad's prophecy  
 "Cursed you'll be, land of Ulad\*  
 And cursed be this cruel day  
 When Derdriu will find her master  
 Let her the Bard's daughter be kept  
 Forever in her prison  
 Let the secret of her beauty  
 Forever be kept hidden  
 From the warriors's raw desires."  
 \*Gaelic name of Ulster

#### **Derdriu's Dream**

She grew up in her prison  
 And Leborcham was her nurse  
 One day Leborcham's husband  
 Was skinning a deer on the snow  
 A crow was drinking the fresh blood  
 Derdriu that night saw in a dream  
 The dazzling vision of a warrior  
 His forehead was as white as snow  
 His lips as red as fresh blood  
 His hair as black as a crow's feathers  
 Long were his legs, piercing his eyes  
 And strong his arms, Ulad's pride  
 On Derdriu's pale cheeks  
 Tears flow ceaselessly  
 A limpid dew on the hawthorn  
 As she contemplates her dream  
 She confesses to Leborcham:  
 "Never will my heart know peace  
 If I don't see that proud warrior  
 Whom I shall love more than my life."

#### **The Ravishment of Derdriu**

The rumor has come to the king  
 Of the young beauty hidden

Far from the world on the mountain  
 As the dove is ravished  
 By the merciless hawk  
 The heifer has to yield  
 To Conchobor the bull  
 Conchobor mac Nessa  
 In the palace of Emain Macha  
 Her heart breaks with sorrow  
 As she dreams of her warrior  
 Vainly she calls for death

### **Derdriu's Three Calls**

Like a stallion between two foals  
 The warrior and his two brothers  
 Appears on the road  
 Her heart leaps in her chest  
 As Derdriu makes her first call  
 "O Noisiu mac Uisnigh, why.  
 Why are you abandoning me?"  
 And Noisiu asks his brothers  
 "What is that cry that I hear?  
 I find it hard not to stop."  
 "It is only a lost curlew"  
 Answers Ainnli. A second time  
 She calls: "Warrior whom I love,  
 Why are you abandoning me?"  
 And Noisiu: "I am telling you,  
 This cry breaks my heart."  
 "It is only a lost plover"  
 Answers Ardán. A third call:  
 "O Noisiu, Noisiu mac Uisnigh  
 Why are you abandoning me?"  
 .And Noisiu :« Never in this world  
 Was there a voice so full of anguish  
 This is not a lost bird  
 I will not take another step  
 As long as I have not seen the one  
 Whose heart I hear breaking."  
 And Noisiu retraced his steps  
 Derdriu stood near the road  
 He took her in his arms  
 The leaf trembles on the aspen

And Noisiu swore his faith to her  
 Never shall he love another  
 The king's guard are in pursuit  
 They flee to the Es Ruad Falls  
 And still further to Benn Etair  
 They'll have to cross the sea  
 And seek refuge in Alba\*  
 The sons of Uishnig will fight  
 Fearlessly for their new land.

[In order to trap Noisiu, Conchobor pretends to forgive the lovers and sends Fergus mac Roigh to invite them back. Noisiu accepts, in spite of Derdriu's forebodings.]

#### **Derdriu's Lament**

Then was heard Derdriu's lament  
 Rising from her pale lips  
 « How hard I find my farewell  
 To this place so dear to my heart  
 Never was I as happy  
 As when I lay in the green clearing  
 Next to Noísiu in the Cuan Woods  
 And in the valley of Masan  
 There were plenty of salmon and deer  
 As soon as the sun rose  
 The house was full of light  
 And on the top of Da Ruad  
 Wrens kept warbling their song  
 Never will I forget  
 The rocks near Daigen  
 The sea so clear on the sand  
 Were it not for the man I love  
 Never would I leave this place  
 S'il n'y avait celui que j'aime  
 Jamais ne m'en irais d'ici."

[Through an enchantment, King Conchobor has caused Fergus mac Roigh to be kept prisoner in Borrach Castle. Fergus swears he will punish the king who has made him break the guarantee of safety which he gave to Noísiu. The treacherous king sends his warriors to kill Noísiu and his brothers, but in spite of their numbers, they fail. The king then begs Cathbad the druid to use his magic powers against Noísiu.]

### **Cathbad's spell**

All day and all night  
 The sons of Uisnigh have fought  
 They have killed the king's warriors  
 Each one has killed three hundred  
 So that the perfidious king  
 Had to retreat more ashamed  
 Than the fox who lost his tail  
 He has gone to his diviner  
 Ready to fall on his knees  
 "For pity's sake, Cathbad, I beg you  
 Only the power of your spells  
 Will keep the sons of Uisnigh  
 From destroying my kingdom"  
 The druid has done the will  
 Of Conchobor the treacherous king  
 And the ocean rose up  
 Engulfing the sons of Uisnigh  
 Hard indeed would be the heart  
 Unmoved by such brave warriors  
 Defeated by the raging seas

### **The Sons of Uisnigh Yield To Their Fate**

Conchobor searches in vain  
 For a vassal shameless enough  
 To kill defenceless enemies  
 Eogan mac Durthacht was tired  
 Of the endless war between  
 His kingdom and Conchobor's Ulad  
 To bring an end to this war  
 He offered to put to death  
 Noísiu and his two brothers  
 Ardán then said to them  
 "I will first go to my death  
 Since I am the youngest"  
 But Ainlí: "Shame to the elder  
 Who'd allow his younger sibling  
 To go first to his death"  
 The Noísiu to Eogan mac Durthacht :  
 "We ask but one thing, king of Fernmag  
 We want to choose the sword  
 By which we'll die



The sword of Manannan mac Lir”  
 The sons of Uisnigh incline their head  
 A single stroke of their shoulders  
 All three together fall beheaded.

### **Noísiu’s Death Song**

Derdriu tomb e de tout son corps  
 On Noísiu’s lifeless body  
 Her breast and her lips are red  
 With her lover’s red blood  
 “They killed the Sons of Uisnigh  
 The most valiant warriors of Eire  
 The blame will fall upon you  
 Men of Ulad who did the will  
 Of your evil king Conchobor  
 No one will ever forget  
 Your cowardice before him  
 The whole world would have been yours  
 O Noísiu since you were the equal,  
 Of Eire’s greatest heroes  
 They killed the sons of Uisnigh  
 Aífe had raised them  
 And Scathach had taught them  
 The art of war and its secrets  
 All the women were in love with them  
 All the warriors feared them  
 Often I had no other bed  
 Than their spears and their shields  
 And my sleep was sweeter  
 Than on the softest bed  
 Next to the king my first husband  
 Life was so sweet near them  
 How bitter it’ll be without them  
 And each moment filled with sorrow  
 Life will be but a nightmare  
 Without Noísiu Ardán and Ainnlí  
 Why did I not fall dead  
 Before the death of Uisnigh’s sons

### **Derdriu’s Suicide**

Derdriu lived one more year

After the death of Uisnigh's sons  
 Her sorrow knew no respite  
 And Conchobor in his anger  
 Calleld for Eogan mac Durthacht  
 "If I cannot comfort you  
 Eogan might do a better job  
 It was he who killed Noísiu  
 From now on you'll be his whore"  
 Conchobor then pushed her  
 Into Eogan's chariot  
 Derdriu looked at him with such contempt  
 That the king told her with a laugh  
 "Between Conchobor and Durthacht  
 Derdriu will look exactly like  
 A ewe between two randy rams"  
 Upon hearing such shameful words  
 Derdriu leapt out of the chariot  
 Her head broke against a rock  
 Thus perished the daughter of  
 D'une agnelle entre deux béliers."  
 A ces mots si pleins de vergogne  
 Derdriu se jette hors du char  
 Sa tête a porté sur la roche  
 C'est ainsi que périt Derdriu.

### **Fergus' Revenge**

Fergus mac Roich has set fire  
 To the four corners of Emain Macha  
 All the women were burnt alive  
 Fergus mac Roich has massacred  
 More than three hundred of the king's vassals  
 And Maine, son of Conchobor  
 Also fell under his sword  
 In Connacht he set his camp  
 Fergus mac Roich and his warriors  
 Come every night into Ulad  
 To plunder kill and ransack  
 The war lasted six years and more  
 Without respite or end  
 All of Ulad was laid waste

## The Death of Fer Diad

*"Fírbriathar, a ingen," bar Ailill, "is maith ben ben daghfir." "Maith omm," barr ind ingen, "cid dia tá lat-su ón?" "Is de atá lim," bar Ailill, ar it ferr-su indiu indá om lá thucus-sa thú." "Ba maith-se remut," ar Medb.*

[Queen Medb of Connacht (i.e., Maeve ) was quite angry when her husband, King Ailill, boasted of his riches, which, he claimed, were far greater than hers. When an inventory was made of what each owned, it was found that the king had only one possession more than the queen: his bull Finnbennach. In all of Ireland there was only one other bull who was Finnbennach's equal, Donn Cuailnge, whose owner was Dáire mac Fiacha, of Ulad. She sent him an embassy, asking Dáire for the loan of his bull for a period of one year, promising him in exchange fifty heifers, a chariot, and, as she said, "the ardent welcome of my two thighs". Dáire accepted enthusiastically, but one of his servants heard one of Maeve's envoys boasting that if Dáire had refused, they would have taken the bull by force. Dáire, quite angry, refused to give the bull. Thus started the war between Connacht and Ulad, the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* [The Cattle-raid of Cooley]. Maeve had under her command the warriors of Connacht, Mumhan and Laighean, as well as the Ulad warriors who had followed Fergus in Connacht. Unfortunately for Ulad, their warriors were then suffering from the curse laid upon their ancestors by Macha. She was the fastest runner in Ireland, and the men of Ulad had forced her to race against a chariot as she was pregnant. For this crime, she had cursed them to suffer, for an extended period, the excruciating pains of childbirth which she herself had born; during that time, they were weaker than a new-born mouse. One Ulad warrior only escaped the curse, Setanta, whose father was the god Lug and mother Deichtine, the sister of king Conchobar. He had been nicknamed Cú Chulainn because, as a child, he had inadvertently killed the guard dog of the smith Ulan. As compensation, he had served as guard dog for the smith until a pup of the dog he had killed could take his place. He was only seventy, and the only defender of Ulad against Maeve's army. ]

## The Slaughter at Ath nGabla

*"Fail ar dá mbeind, mana n-dig,  
cend Fráech ocus cend Fochnáim.  
Fail araile ar dá mbeind  
cend Eirre ocus cend Innill."*

Maeve's army advanced  
Meeting with no resistance  
Cúil Silinne, Móin Coltna,  
Sinann River, Mag Trega,  
Cranaird, Iraid Cuillenn,

They were past Cúil Sibrille,  
 Ath nGabla was in sight  
 Cú Chulainn was waiting at the ford

With a single stroke of his sword  
 He had cut down a tree  
 And put it in the middle of the ford  
 No war chariot could pass  
 To the right or to the left  
 When the charioteers arrived  
 They got a most pleasant welcome  
 .Err andInniu, Fráech and Fochmann  
 Each was beheaded  
 Cú Chulainn then placed  
 Each head on a branch  
 Horrible fruits to scare  
 All those who would follow  
 Butd the queen did not yield  
 She would need more lessons

### **Cú C'hulainn's Feats**

*Táinic dano Lethan fora áth for Níth i crích Conailli Murthemme do chomruc fri Coin  
 Culaind. Barroptar forsín náth.*

As long as the men of Ulad  
 Would suffer the pains of childbirth  
 Cú Chulainn would have to fight  
 Maeve's army all by himself  
 Her chariots raced after him  
 So fast their axles nearly broke  
 That is when Cú Chulain cut off  
 The head of Orlám, Maeve's son  
 One charioteer had dared  
 Come close to Cú Chulainn  
 Who with a stone cast from afar  
 Broke the foolish man's skull  
 Arach's three sons had thought  
 They could ambush him  
 Each one of them got his throat cut  
 As did also their charioteers  
 Fráech mac Fidaig lost his life

So did the queen's dog Baiscne .  
 The river Níth in Conaille  
 Saw more of his feats of arms.  
 Lethan in the middle of the ford  
 Maine, the son of Ailill and Maeve  
 And sixty more warriors  
 Fell under Cú Chulainn's sword  
 Maeve's army melted away

### **Finnabair's Punishment**

*Rucad i pupaill Medba ó chíanaib. Tucad ingen Findabair ara lethláim. Is í dortes curnufair. Is í dobeir phóic la cech n-óendig dó. Is í gaibes láimfora chuit.*

Quenn Maeve was thinking  
 « Cú Chulainn has no peer  
 In Ireland unless I call  
 Cú Roi mac Dáiri to help me  
 Or a warrior like Nath Crantail”  
 Cú Roi refused at once  
 But Nath Crantail did not say no  
 If he got in exchange  
 Finnabair the fair maiden  
 Maeve and Ailill's daughter  
 Nath Crantail won't know her bed  
 For Cú Chulainn will cut his head  
 Not far from Ochaine  
 The Cú's spear killed Buide mac Báin.  
 And also Redg the Mocker  
 This was in the land of Cúib  
 They fell by the hundreds  
 Nathcoirpthe in the forest  
 Cruithen in the middle of a ford  
 Near Focherd it was the turn  
 Of Cú mac Daláth. There also  
 Were killed Teorá Mac n-Aignec'h  
 And others:: Lath mac Dabró  
 With Srubdaire mac Fidaig.  
 Fer Báeth mac Fir Bend had been  
 A good friend of Cú C'hulainn  
 At the time when both waged war  
 At the side of Scathach across the sea

Cú Chulainn did not want to  
 Fight with his old comrade at arms  
 But Fer Baéth was stubborn  
 Cú Chulainn was forced to kill him  
 Many more fell by his hand  
 They had been invited to come  
 For dinner under Maeve's tent  
 Finnabair would serve them  
 Poured glass after glass of wine  
 And the queen whispered to them  
 "Cut off the head of Cú Chulainn  
 And Finnabair will be yours"  
 Each would accept but by the morrow  
 Each one of them has lost his life  
 Láirine who was the brother  
 Of Lúgaid mac Nóis was fool enough  
 To go alone against the Cú  
 Who seized him in his arms  
 He pressed so hard that all the shit  
 Came out of Láirine's bowels  
 Who never more could empty them  
 Without crying out with pain  
 Cú Chulainn also killed  
 Lóc'h mac Mofébais and his brother  
 And all those who were fool enough  
 To attack the Cú at night.  
 Soon regretted their mistake  
 There was seventy of them  
 Every one had his head cut off  
 That was near the ford of Ath Traigid.  
 This is also the place where fell  
 Six warriors of Clanna Dedad  
 The queen had sent her best men  
 Against the Cú: none survived  
 Much longer still would be the list  
 Of those whom Cú Chulainn did kill.  
 The rivers were red with the blood  
 Flowing from the victims' wounds  
 Maeve and Ailill wanted a truce  
 They thought of offering Finnabair  
 Cú Chulainn accepted the girl  
 But it was only a new trick

They had placed a crown  
 On the head of Tamun the Fool  
 But Cú Chulainn saw through the trick  
 He broke the head of the poor Fool  
 Impaled him on a pillar of stone  
 The Cú captured Finnabair  
 Cut off her long blond locks  
 And impaled the poor girl  
 So that the pillar passed between  
 Her body and her chemise  
 Finnabair was not freed  
 Until dawn when Maeve and Aillill  
 Came looking for her  
 After this there was no longer  
 Question of truce or armistice

[Cú Chulainn was in desperate need of rest. He slept for three days and three nights: his father Lug had come from the land of the Sídh to watch over his beloved son. The pains of childbirth did not afflict adolescents. Their bands were commanded by Follamain, Conchobor's son, They wanted to help Cú Chulainn. For weapons, they took their hockey sticks. By Lia Toll they fought all through their hero's sleep. Follamain had sworn he would not return without Aillill's head at his belt: he was the one who lost his head. Upon waking up, Cú Chulainn heard of his death. In his fury he was taller than a giant: on his war chariot he raced through the enemy, mowing them down like rows of hay. After the death of the sons of Uisnigh, Fergus mac Roigh had settled in Connacht with his men. He hated Conchobor for his treachery, but he loved Cú Chulainn who had been his foster son. Dubthach the Black had suggested that the entire army attack Cú Chulainn, but Fergus shut him up: such a (forfeit) would bring them shame, and when the Ulad men would rise from their bed of pain, they would exact a terrible revenge. Ferchu Loingsig led a band a cattle rustlers: who stole from king Aillill's herds. He thought that all his past crimes would be forgiven if he could bring Cú Chulainn's head to the king. Their band of twelve would fall on Cú Chulainn in the middle of the night and kill him in his sleep. But at dawn their twelve heads adorned each a rock. Since then this spot bears the name of Cinnit Ferchu Loingsig. The next day Queen Maeve sent twenty nine of her best warriors against Cú Chulainn: Gáile Dána, his twenty seven sons and Glas mac Delga his nephew. Fergus mac Roich did not approve, but Maeve refused to budge: it is still a duel, since all these men are Gáile Dana's flesh and blood. Fergus withdrew in his tent, and told his men: "To-morrow Cú Chulain shall be slaughtered?" "How could this be?, they exclaimed. No man can do it." «No man can, but the poison will. The Gáile Dána put poison on their weapons. A single scratch on a man, and within a month he dies." Fiacha mac Fir Febe volunteered to go and watch the fight. The Gáile Dána threw their spears all together, but Cú Chulain knew how to handle his shield. Then all the Dána rushed toward him. When Fiacha saw all the hands brandishing their poisoned swords, he drove his chariot along their line, cutting the hands as he rode by. "Just in time, said Cú Chulainn. Fiacha was

conderned: he had broken the pact between king Aillill and Fergus. What would happen if one of the Gáile Dána managed to survive and report him to the king? Cú Chulainn told him not to worry and cut off everby Dána's head. Twenty nine pillars were raised on the spot of the massacre. ]

### **The Invitation**

*"Finnabair na ferrga,  
rígan íarthair Elgga  
ar ndíth Chon na Cerdda  
A Fhir Diad, rot fía."*

The queen and all here advisers  
The chose to send a messenger  
To Fer Diad mac Damáin  
Whose skin was all armour  
Harder than a sword.of steel  
He was Cú Chulainn;s foster brother.  
They both had studied the art of war  
With Scathach and her daughter,  
The one whose name was Uathach.  
His fame was in every respect  
Equal to Cú Chulainn's  
Except for one thing:  
Cú Chulainn had mastered the use  
Of the *gae bolga*\*  
And Fer Diad had not  
Fer Diad did not care  
Because of the skin of steel  
Armouring his entire body.  
Fer Diad at first refused  
To do what the queen asked  
But she had prepared a feast  
For him,, and Finnabair  
Was seated at his side  
For each cup of wine he drank  
She gave his three kisses  
And very soon she offered him  
The sweet apples of her breasts  
Which he found much to his taste  
The queen then asked him  
-- Why do you think, my friend,



You have been invited here?  
 -- And why should I not be?  
 Is there any man in your camp  
 Who could claim to be my equal?  
 -- This is why I shall give you  
 A chariot, weapons, harness,  
 Half the land of Aí,  
 And Finnabair in your bed,  
 And if need be I will add  
 The ardent welcome of my thighs  
 -- You may offer me all your goods  
 Yet I never really could  
 Go against my foster brother  
 -- Cú Chulainn was quite right,  
 The queen answered with a mocking smile  
 Fer Diad swallowed the bait  
 Hook, line and sinker with it  
 -- What did he say? he asked  
 -- That the killing of Fer Diad  
 Would hardly be my hardest feat  
 -- I shall pierce his damned tongue  
 Said Fer Diad, all filled with rage  
 To-morrow I'll be at the ford  
 -- And our wishes will be with you  
 Fer Diad, our protector  
 All that has been promised to you  
 Shall be given, gold, silver, arms and land  
 And Finnabair in your bed  
 As soon as the dog is muzzled  
 Fergus has saddled his horse  
 To give warning to Cú Chulainn  
 -- To-morrow Fer Diad shall come  
 Full of anger toward you  
 -- This fight could never please me  
 Not because I am afraid  
 But because of the love  
 I have always had for him  
 -- And yet fear would be justified  
 No steel has ever managed to pierce  
 The tough armour of his skin  
 -- Have no concern about me  
 I do not care for idle boasts

But you know I'll be the winner  
 All night till dawn in his tent  
 Fer Diad could not sleep a wink  
 He knew it would be very hard  
 To win the fight with Cú Chulainn

\* The exact nature of the *gae bolga* is not known. Apparently, it was a kind of spear which was launched under water with some kind of thrower. When it had penetrated the enemy's body, a powerful spring released sharp blades radiating from the shaft (somewhat like the ribs of an umbrella which opens up when one presses the trigger mechanism). The blades sliced through all the organs. To recover the weapon, it was necessary to dissect the victim's body..

.[At dawn, Fer Diad's charioteer remonstrated with him, reminding him of the time when both he and Cú Chulainn were waging war abroad. The enemies had disarmed Fer Diad, and Cú Chulainn killed one hundred of them to recapture his foster brother's sword. Another time, when Fer Diad had entered the home of Scathach's head servant without asking the man's permission, the man hit him with his fork, throwing him down to the ground and threatening him, Cú Chulainn cut off the man's head to save his friend's life. Fer Diad then told his driver: "Had you told me all this yesterday, I would not now be quarrelling with Cú Chulainn who was my brother." But it was too late, and to break the bonds of brotherhood they exchanged insults. On the first day, they fought with javelins and lances. In the evening, the fighting stopped, and they exchanged remedies and dressing for their wounds, and food. On the next day, they fought with the long lances, launching their chariots against each other. On the third day, they used the claymore and, as before they exchanged remedies, dressing and food.]

### The Death of Fer Diad

*Is trúaig aní nar tá de,  
 'nar ndaltanaib Scáthaiche,  
 missi créchtach ba chrú  
 tussu gan charptiu d'ímlúad.*

*Is trúaig aní nar tá de,  
 'nar ndaltanaib Scáthaiche,  
 missi créchatach ba chrú garb  
 ocus tussu ultimarb.*

*Is trúaig aní nar tá de,  
 'nar ndaltanaib Scáthaiche  
 tussu d'éc, missi beó brass,  
 is gleó ferge in ferachas."*

Fer Diad had felt in advance  
 That this would be his final day  
 With the shield and the sword  
 He had accomplished feats  
 Which had dazzled Cú Chulain  
 The Cú then gave this order  
 To Laeg his faithful charioteer  
 If ever you see me yield  
 Mock me so that I'll be a raging beast  
 Fer Diad asked Cú Chulainn  
 -- Where shall we have our fight to day?  
 -- Right n the middle of the river  
 Fer Diad did not refuse  
 Although he felt his heart grow weak  
 The bravest of the warriors.  
 Found himself as powerless  
 As a kitten when Cú Chulainn  
 Resorted to the *gae bolga*  
 The invincible weapon which flew  
 On the water surface. It sharp point  
 Went into the enemy's body  
 Releasing it thirty blades  
 Which sliced stomach, lungs and heart  
 Bowels, liver, spleen, and kidneys.  
 Fer Diad who knew all that  
 Wore a thick stone like an apron  
 Until noon they kept fighting  
 Accomplishing a thousand feats  
 But none could strike the winning blow  
 Cú Chulainn at last leapt  
 To strike a good blow from above  
 But Fer Diad raising his arm  
 Made the Cú fall in the river  
 Laeg then laughed at Cú Chulainn  
 "You really are just a pup  
 To let him treat you like a rag  
 One throws away into the trash  
 Cú Chulainn then became a beast  
 The fight became so violent  
 That the river has burst its banks  
 The Cú is cut and losing blood

The wound must be quickly bound  
 Cú Chulainn shouts: “*Gae bolga!*”  
 But throws a spear above the belt  
 Fer Diad has to raise his shield  
 The *gae bolga* hits below  
 Breaking the stone, piercing the skin  
 And triggering the thirty blades  
 -- You have killed me, Cú C'hulainn.  
 The blood will never dry on your hands  
 Cú Chulainn has carried the dead body  
 To the north bank of the river  
 So that it may forever rest  
 In the land of Ulad  
 And then he has lost consciousness  
 Laeg has run up to him: “Get up  
 Cúcuc. Foes will soon be here.  
 -- I might as well die right now  
 Have I not killed my own brother?  
 -- And did not your own brother  
 Give you that wound that bleeds to death?  
 -- What do I care if he is dead  
 He who was so dear to me  
 O Fer Diad, you were so wrong  
 To listen to that evil queen!  
 Now you are no longer alive  
 And I remain to mourn you  
 Laeg has cut up the dead body  
 To retrieve the *gae bolga*.  
 C. – Tis a pity to see to your corpse  
 O Fer Diad, lying there  
 So pale near the *gae bolga*  
 All red with your blood  
 And your empty chariot  
 Nothing will stop my sorrow  
 How cruel is my fate!

### The Final Battle

*And sain geibis Medb sciath díten dar éis fer nHérend. And sain faitte Medb in Dond  
 Cúalgne co coíca dá shamascib imbe ocus ochtor dá hechlachaib leiss timchell co Crúachain.  
 Gipé rashossed, gipé ná rossed, go rossed in Dond Cúalgne feib ra gell-si.*

At last the labor pains had left  
The men of Ulad. Cú Chulainn  
Had been severely wounded  
Ficce's sons and Senoll Uathach  
Came at last to take him away  
Fingin the Leech dressed all his wounds  
Conchobor had gathered all his men  
To fight Ailill and Maeve's army  
Between Gáireach and Irgáireach  
Maeve and Ailill were defeated  
Some of Maeve's men had taken  
The Donn and his herd of heifers  
To the lush meadows of Crúachan  
The Donn, on the plains of Mag Aí  
Came across the bull Finnbennach  
Their duel lasted a whole day  
The earth shook under their hooves  
When they rushed against each other  
Donn came back alone to Crúachan  
Next morning Donn came back alone  
To Crúachan. Finnbennach's carcass  
Hung from his horns, and the Donn left  
For Cúailgne. Near Ui Echach  
He fell dead on the green meadow.  
And for seven entire years  
Nowhere in all of Ireland  
Was there a single warrior killed.

## Suibhne's Madness

### Suibhne's Sacrilege

*Is olc sén ar millessa  
aínech Rónáin Fínn*

« That monk must be really crazy  
If he has been impudent enough  
To raise a temple to his god  
On the lands of my kingdom.  
Rónán Fínn will be sorry  
For the day when he dared  
Crossed the border of Dál nAraide  
Suibhne mac Colmán is not a man  
Whose strict orders can be ignored  
Without the harshest punishment. »  
Anger had filled me when his bell  
Had pulled me out of my sweet sleep  
The sweet companion of my bed  
Eorann the Fair, had sought in vain  
To calm my fury. She held me back  
By the edge of my tunic  
But it remained in her hands  
I rushed out of my home  
As naked as a new born babe  
Taking only some of my spears  
Rónán was busy with his cult  
A weaker man might have been moved  
By the white hair around his bald pate  
A slap across his fingers and his book  
Was at the bottom of the lake  
Another slap would have hit  
The monk's ill-advised mouth  
Had it not been for the messenger  
Sent by Congal, kind of Ulad

He asked me to join his forces  
 On the big plain of Mag Rath  
 Rónán was bold enough to follow  
 He dared believe he would make peace  
 Between Congal, king of Ulad  
 And Domnall, his old enemy  
 That damn monk was swollen with pride  
 His band kept shouting: "Miracle!"  
 Because an otter had brought back  
 They claimed, the book fallen into the lake  
 In his pride he even dared  
 Invoke his god to curse my name  
 Prophesying that some day I would  
 Wander alone through the world  
 As naked as a new born babe  
 And his disciple by his side  
 Was preparing to throw at me  
 Some magic water with a fox-tail  
 The pup had hardly raised his hand  
 That a spear was flying straight  
 Toward the hollow of his chest  
 A second one would surely have  
 Found the heart of Rónán Fínn  
 But for the bell which was hanging  
 From his neck by an iron chain  
 And which turned away the spear  
 At once Rónán asked of his god  
 To make me fly as did my spear  
 And pierce my chest as I had done  
 To the chest of his acolyte

### **The Saint's Curse**

*Do-rat mise it chumnmansa*

*Mallacht Rónáin Fínn*

Before the two armies came to blows  
 They shouted war-cries more dreadful  
 Than if lightning had fallen straight upon me  
 Mais avant que les deux armées  
 My hands grew weak: they could no more  
 Hold my sword, the blood in my veins  
 Turned to water. And I took flight

Faster than any spear; all my limbs  
 Trembled far worse than aspen leaves  
 And I went to perch on a branch  
 It was such heartbreak to find out  
 From Angus my kinsman  
 That Congal Claén had been killed  
 That Domnall had carried the day  
 Angus himself fled for his life  
 But the hardest was to see  
 The contempt burning in his eyes  
 I had to fly farther away  
 And I flew like a crow  
 When at last I came to stop  
 It was, I think, in Tír Conaill  
 At Cíll Riagáin. Domnall's warriors  
 Showed me their teeth like wolves  
 Poking fun at the black feathers  
 Which had gown over my body  
 Again I had to fly away

### **The King's Punishment**

*Mor múich i túsa in-nocht;  
 rothregd mo chorp in gaéth glan*

During seven long years I fled  
 Here and there, night and day  
 Over the top of the mountains  
 I had such bitter memories  
 Of the night I spent with Eorann  
 Before the day when cruel fate  
 Made me into this wandered  
 Cursed by the day when I happened  
 To meet that bloody Rónán Fínn  
 Whose bell and whose magic water  
 Turned me into this scarecrow  
 Cursed be the day when Congal Claén  
 Gave me this sumptuous present  
 This tunic with gold ornaments  
 The warriors who caught sight of it  
 Kept shouting to each other:  
 "Don't let the bird hide in the brush"  
 They tracked me to Mac Coba  
 And I leapt among the trees



Arrows kept coming at me  
 Like hailstones in a storm  
 And faster than the wind  
 They hummed as they flew by  
 If I was not killed  
 It sure was not for lack of trying  
 The greyhounds chase after the hare flee  
 And like a hare I kept racing  
 I suffered through the long years  
 When I had lost all my good sense  
 Before my faithful Loingsechán  
 At last found me and gave me help

**Suibhne sous la neige**

*Dúairc in betha beith gan tech;*  
*truag in betha, a Christ cain*

It is snowing and i twill snow  
 It is freezing on the mountain  
 On the heights of Sliabh meic Sin  
 My skin is blue, my feet are sore  
 This is what Rónán did to me  
 And when I was on Benn Boirche  
 Freezing rain kept falling on me  
 Tonight by body will be racked  
 On the trunk of an oak ib Gáille  
 Far from the moors of Glenn Bolcáin  
 Since feathers grew on my body  
 I have endured cruel torments  
 Who will come to succor me?  
 I was no more than wild game  
 For the foe in hot pursuit  
 From Mag Line unt Mag Lí  
 And from Mag Lí to the Life  
 I will have to cross once more  
 The heights of Sliabh Fúait  
 Rath Mor Mag nAí et Mac Luirg  
 And before I reach Crúachán  
 From Sliabh Chua to Gáille  
 The way will not be easy  
 And the goal will still be far  
 A peaceful valley on Sliabh Breg  
 Hard is the fate of a mad king

Who has no other nourishment  
 Than the green cress of fountains  
 And nothing to drink by  
 The foaming water of mountain streams  
 I have had to seek shelter  
 Among wild wolves in the forest  
 And no one took pity on  
 Such a miserable life

**Suibhne et Eorann**

*Súanach sin, a Eorann án  
 I leith leptha ret lennán*

At that time Eorann was sharing  
 Rge bed of Gúaire mac Congal  
 Gúaire was hunting in the woods  
 When Suibhne came to see her  
 -- The night is sweet for you  
 O Eorann, sleeping with your new love  
 Have you so quickly forgotten  
 The vows so dear to my heart?  
 An oath is soon forgotten  
 If you still have a warm bed  
 While I freeze on the mountain  
 -- Never shall I stop loving  
 The poor beggar who was my king  
 I may still have a warm bed  
 But my heart languishes in pain  
 Since the day when Suibhne my king  
 Lost his throne and his reason  
 -- The son of Congal is quite handsome  
 Feast with your new lover man  
 Forget the one of yesteryear  
 -- If ever I have been seated  
 Next to the prince in his banquets  
 Be sure that I would have preferred  
 To spend my nights by your side  
 Sleeping on the naked heath  
 -- Better for you, my poor Eorann  
 Live in peace in a rich palace  
 Than go and beg for your bread  
 With such a hideous scarecrow  
 -- If only I could ever choose

Between all the Irish heroes  
 It is with you, my dear Suibhne  
 That I would wander through the land  
 Living on cress and cold water  
 My heart breaks when I see you  
 O Suibhne. Cruel is the thorn  
 Which stings and tears at your flesh  
 How I would like to follow you  
 Covered with feathers like a swan  
 Flying with you above the sea  
 -- I did you wrong, o Eorann  
 My bed is much too hard and cold  
 For the lady who was my queen  
 Gúaire would be returning soon  
 And Suibhne had to run away

[In the course of his wanderings, Suibhne encounters his liege Loingsechan, and tells him about his life in the wilderness. Loingsechan gives him shelter in a mill, where Suibhne meets with an old woman who, by questioning him about his adventures, causes him to sink again into madness. When he regains his sense and tries to return home, the saint's curse puts obstacles in his way. Finally, Saint Mo Ling takes pity on him and gives him shelter in his hermitage, although is powerless to lift Saint Rónán's curse. Suibhne's wanderings all through Ireland has given the author an opportunity to express his feelings for the harsh beauty of the land, as in the following two poems]

### **L'appel de la Garbh**

*Gáir na Gairbe glaídbinne  
 glaídes re tosach tuinne*

The Garbh roars towards the sea  
 Fish are at play in its waters  
 The sight of its waves crowned with foam  
 Rising against the current  
 Always rejoices my heart  
 I love to look at their struggle  
 And to hear the birds on the shore  
 As the tide breaks against the reefs  
 I love the deep song of the river  
 During the great rites of winter  
 I often rested on its bank  
 And its music lulled me to sleep  
 My heart burnt with nostalgia

When I was at Durtaigh Faighlen  
 Taking my rest on the mountains  
 As curlews screeched above the sea  
 And on the heights of Rinn Ros Bruic  
 In Saint Mo Ling's ermitage  
 The holy man prayed to his god  
 The night is coll. In the distance  
 A stag is belling and starlings  
 Gather in the Fec Cuille Woods  
 Night has fallen. The storm is raging  
 Over Inbhear Dubhglaise  
 The wild cries of the Garbh  
 Join the sabbath of the sea  
 I love to see the salmon leap  
 In the falls of Eas Dubhtaige  
 But nothing could ever equal  
 The majestic voice of the Garbh  
 And often I have left the heights  
 Of Benn Boirche and Benn Bógain  
 When the powerful call of the Garbh  
 Reached the meadows of Benn Bólcain  
 O Mo Ling, in your hermitage  
 I have found peace. There  
 My story shall find its hend  
 May your god save me from evil!  
 \*There is an auxiliary syllable [□] between the consonants r and bh

### Suibhne

*M'airioclán hì Túaim Inbir:*  
*nì lántechdais bes sèstu*

Suibhne loved his oratory  
 "My oratory at Túaim Inbir  
 Is tiny but a palace  
 Would please me less. Gobhán  
 Built it but the Lord  
 Himself made the roof  
 One is safe from spear or arrow  
 My oratory On n'y caint ni lances ni flèchesT  
 Mon oratoire at Túaim Inbir  
 Is lighted by the stars."

### La mort de Suibhne

*A Mo Ling, na connailbe  
gus' tucus cenn mo báire*

However far did Suibhne wander  
 Every evening he returned  
 The milkmaid had made a hole  
 In the ground, lined with clay  
 She filled it up with some fresh milk  
 Suibhne threw himself on the ground  
 And lapped up the milk like a pup  
 The milkmaid was named Muirghil  
 And her husband was Mongán  
 The swineherd. He hated the care  
 His wife took of poor Suibhne  
 Next to the freshly poured milk  
 He planted into the ground  
 The sharp horn of a stag  
 Covered it up with tufts of hay  
 When Suibhne came to drink the milk  
 The horn went straight into his chest  
 Thus was fulfilled Saint Rónán's curse  
 Before giving up his spirit  
 Suibhne confessed his sins to Mo Ling  
 Who gave him the final rites  
 Confessa sa faute à Mo Ling  
 Qui lui donna les huiles saintes  
 -- There was a time, said Suibhne,  
 When my heart took pleasure only  
 In blackbirds singing in the woods  
 Or in stags belling through the storm  
 And mocked the bell of the saint.  
 -- There was a time, said Suibhne  
 When my heart took pleasure only  
 In the eagle's cry on the heights  
 And despised the voice of women  
 -- There was a time, said Suibhne  
 When my heart took pleasure only  
 In wolves howling in the forests  
 And despised the pious anthems  
 Of monks celebrating their god

Suibhne has lost all consciousness  
The hermit with his disciple's help  
Looked for a pillar of granite  
-- Here he will be buried  
And this rock will mark the grave  
Of Suibhne the poor mad king  
I took pity on his sad fate  
And for the sake of the poor king  
I love the places which he loved  
The streams and their green watercress  
The rocks from which clear water springs  
And where he liked to come to drink  
I loved having him near me  
And forever I'll remember  
The time we spent together  
If it please the King of Heaven  
Rise up, give me your hand  
And may God answer my prayer!  
The king had regained consciousness  
Mo Ling carried him in his arms  
To the porch of the chapel  
Suibhne leaned against the portal  
With a sigh he gave up the ghost  
God welcome him in paradise!

**The Exile of the Sons of Uisnigh**

Cathbad's prophecy  
 Derdriu's dream  
 The Ravishment of Derdriu  
 The Three Calls of Derdriu  
 Conchobor's Rage  
 The mission of Fergus mac Roigh  
 Derdriu's Lament  
 Derdriu's Prophecy  
 The Red Branch  
 Leborcham's Mission  
 Traighthren's Mission  
 Buinne's Treachery  
 The Death of Illann Brea  
 Cathbad's Spell  
 The Sons of Uisnigh yield to their fate  
 The Death Song of Uisnigh  
 Derdriu's Suicide  
 Fergus' Revenge

**The Killing of Fer Diad**

The Quarrel  
 The Mission  
 Macha's Curse  
 Fedelm's Prophecy  
 The Slaughter at Ath nGabla  
 Cú Chuláinn's Feats  
 Finnabair's Punishment  
 Cú Chulainn's Sleep  
 The Prophecy of Fergus\  
 The Massacre of the Gáile Dána  
 The Request  
 The Duel  
 The Killing of Fer Diad  
 The Final Battle

**Suibhne's Madness**

Suibhne's Sacrilege  
 The Saint's Curse  
 The King's Punishment  
 Suibhne in the Snow  
 Suibhne and Eorann

Suibhne and Longsechan  
Suibhne and the Old Woman of the Mill  
Thw Call of the Garbh  
The Orarory of Suibhne  
The Death of Suibhne